



A
FREE ADDRESS
TO
FREEMEN.



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A
FREE ADDRESS
TO
FREEMEN.

By WILLIAM SHARP, jun.

*Si vera dico, recta facio, cur mihi
Quisquam imperare debeat silentium?*

B.

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A

F R E E A D D R E S S

T O

F R E E M E N.

Si habes aliquam spem de republica, sive desperas, ea para;
cogita, quæ esse in eo cive ac viro debent, qui sit rempubli-
cam afflictam et oppressam miseris temporibus in veterem
dignitatem ac libertatem vindicaturus. C I C.

GENTLEMEN,

AS your worthy president is prevented
by ill health from attending the duties
of the chair, it falls on me, as *his* and
your acknowledged *deputy*, to make up, as I can,
the want of his services.

B

The

The occasion on which we meet, you know, Gentlemen, is of a most happy and delightful remembrance ;—the recovery of three kingdoms from the blackest woes of slavery, ever the companions of popery and arbitrary power.

But, all things here, yield to the changes of men, manners, and times. And though it be the most distant thought from my heart to depress your spirits, if I were in this address exactly to pursue the customary path of joy and congratulation, you would be apt to suspect me, either as less acquainted with the present state of things than I *am*, or less concerned for it than I *ought* to be.

In perfect consistence then, with the original intentions of our institution, and with the best wishes we form respecting the interests of Liberty, recovered and established by the Revolution, and forely wounded by late neglects and bloody violations, let me solicit your candid attention to some hasty thoughts on the duties of private citizens.

Courtiers

Courtiers who live by plundering the people, roundly deny them any share in matters of this kind. Their writers, who are hired to argue the nation out of their love of freedom, and to abuse every glorious measure which is calculated to support it, make the arguing enquiring freeholder the subject of their constant ridicule and abuse. Let these men, say they, (in their arrogant insult) "mind their stalls, their shops and counting-houses, and keep their names out of the Gazette. The common people may be happy in any situation, and if they plague themselves in meddling with what is out of their line, let the rod be exercised till they repent their folly."

In this precluded number, Gentlemen, I rank with the greater part of this worthy society. But, I feel no lessening of myself from such insolent censures.

On the contrary, I am called to greater firmness and fortitude in asserting my rights.

With

With these principles, indulge me, while I briefly enquire,

I. What you *are* as Englishmen ;

II. What you *should be* as such, and the best methods of answering the obligations of your character.

When it is asked what Englishmen *are*, I would reply, as Englishmen we are *F R E E*. It is in this country, almost alone, that the independence of human nature is asserted and provided for. Here, as the people are subject to government, government itself is subject to law. The private man has a remedy against the king himself, who is undistinguished in the distribution of justice ; the rules of *legislation* are the professed wisdom and equal formation of *all*, and power appears in its only proper light, engaged for the service, but abhorrent to the oppression of mankind. Here, to be more particular, every man has a fixed inherent right, both as to the freedom of person and property, which nothing but voluntary crimes, and their established checks and penalties can alienate and infringe.

The

The immortal ALFRED, (of whom it is to be wished all other kings were imitators) said, that the *English* people were as free as the internal thoughts of a man. And agreeably to this royal eulogium, a late excellent French author with no less candour than justice, expresses himself in the language of admiration: “ En Angleterre
 “ être homme, et être *libre* c’est le même chose.”
 In *England*, to be a man and a *freeman* is the same thing.

This, I own, is the idea under which I have ever been instructed to consider myself; and often, in the hours of recollection, to break out in grateful rapture, Happy is the man who is born an inhabitant of England!

Am I (was I wont to say) so totally lost to the distinctions given in this country to its inhabitants, that I should be a stranger to the principles of that noble *liberty*, which animates and confirms the pursuits of knowledge, renders political society equal and harmonious, and breathes and blesses in religion?

Here,

Here, I call things by their proper names. I am taught that *magistrates* and *kings* are not my arbitrary *lords* and *masters*, but my *elected* and *sworn* defenders. Whatever I virtuously pursue, I am not only protected, but encouraged to attain; whatever I lawfully acquire, I am secured in the possession of, from assault and arbitrary invasion. And carrying my views higher as a reasonable and immortal being, I am enabled to look down with contempt on all the encroachments of priests, and popes, and councils, sects, synods, and assemblies, which intercept the natural converse of the mind with truth, reason, and the God who gave it. I can refuse my obedience to all the wickedness and nonsense of imposition, and express all my sentiments of benevolence and piety without equivocation or fear.

Such is the comprehensive idea, on which the mind that has felt the pleasure it describes, would burn to enlarge. But this, you are sensible, has not always been the happy privilege of the inhabitants of England. Early times found us savages; barbarous tyrannies long
continued

continued us such; and even the illuminating rays of *reformation* were either too feeble to dispel the general darkness, or soon diverged from their salutary purpose.

I need not tell you, that under the Scottish tyrants, (whom *England* is ever bound to curse; *tyrannorum omnium pessimi*) Liberty, if it had a being, was reduced to a wandering and forlorn estate. The reigns of the * *Stuarts* were direct wars

* These expressions will grate harshly on the ears of those who are Stuartists, or who are not entirely delivered from that prejudice, which has a reverence for the pseudo-martyr.—But *ad rem*—The only question between the *Stuarts* and their opponents, is this; “are kings *accountable to God only*, and as such, have they a right divine to govern wrong;” to gratify their pride and caprice at the expence of the properties and lives of their subjects?—Or are they delegated *ministers* of public good, and accountable to the people, for whose protection, and by whom they are appointed? The *Stuarts* uniformly asserted the first, the laws of England, the laws of NATURE, the laws of common sense, affirm and support the latter.—And to go on *ad Reges*—Suffice it to say As to JAMES I. . . . as his *personal* abominable vices sunk him beneath the brute, so his total want of courage and true policy, and his high-flown ideas of prerogative, rendered him contemptible and mischievous as a *king*. . . . As to CHARLES I. if we may not say with MILTON, that he was Nerone Neronior, we may with one of the best writers of modern times, “that he

wars on the first rights of humanity. As all depended, according to their despotic system, on the royal will, and that will was perfectly superior to human question and controul, Civil Property, those advantages and privileges for which government was originally and only designed, could have no security under them; nor could they be protectors of the liberal sentiments of protestantism, whose whole view was arbitrary power, and who knew and courted popery as the fittest means of obtaining and establishing it.

“ was a poor misguided creature, whose maxims of government, derived from his father, were entirely hostile to the English constitution, and whose obstinate persistency in them, brought on him that fate he suffered.” As to CHARLES II. surely every Englishman and Protestant is bound to execrate the memory of a prince, concerning whom the faithful, impartial *recorder* of the Stuarts, DAVID HUME, Esq; is *obliged* to relate, that he had signed a treaty with the French monarch (on the stipulation of an annual pension) to restore popery and arbitrary power in *England*, and to subdue her protestant neighbours the Dutch. JAMES II. drove too rapidly in his career of tyranny for the Pope, or the * * * * * to keep him in countenance. I trouble the reader with this note from a former tract, entitled, *A Charge to Englishmen*. But, for a just account of the Stuarts in their personal conduct and public misrule, besides the collections of the laborious and accurate Dr. Harris, consult the glorious modern MAGNA CHARTA of *liberty*, the history of the excellent Mrs. MACAULAY.

The

The *prince* we commemorate this evening, rescued us from their infernal usurpation. And when the question is repeated, what Englishmen are? and it is answered, Freemen—they never will forget the hero from whose labours they date themselves such, with a fulness of triumph.

Nor be it thought, that as individuals, as private men, we are unconcerned in these interesting subjects. Public spirit is the only basis and protection of our national character, and dearly ought it to be cherished.

There is not so moving a sight as a *shackled* people. Though a country affords the most delightful prospects, yet if its inhabitants are slaves, have no rights nor liberties independent of power, they are only prisoners at large.

And what if we are incapable of arranging, with logical exactness, the arguments for truth and freedom, or even penetrating the refined theories of government, which some learned writers beautifully delineate? Our feelings are as quick as any. And the difference between

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oppression

oppression and protection, absurdity and reason, is obvious to all. *Liberty*, like the golden rule of equity, depends not on a long train of reasoning to be understood, nor requires the acuteness of casuistry to determine on its questions. It produces a law, which the weakest memory may retain, and no clouding commentaries can perplex. We need not look beyond ourselves for it, (*Quod petitur hic est*) *Do justly, nor dare do wrong.*

The virtues of honour, honesty, zeal for universal good, animated piety and religion, are as much the privilege of the private citizen as the royal favourite, and oftener found with *him*, than on the throne or in the palace.

We all contribute our share to the support of the state: and, while many of the great, with an eagerness at a total distance from public spirit, are sacrificing to private expectations, and particular interests, we never know a wish inconsistent with the general prosperity.

All politicians and philosophers also, are sadly mistaken, if the common people compose not its strength and security. If the haughty managers of the present times deny this, for my own part, I should be glad they were convinced by actual experience.

Such then are *Englishmen* by the happy constitution of their polity and laws. And such, they should be, from steady principle and practice. But how far the one has been corrupted and subverted, and how far many are *treacherously* departed from the other, it requires less judgment than honesty and courage to pronounce. *Tacuisse tamen multis profuit.*

With equal freedom you will now permit me to point out,

II. What as *Englishmen* we *should* be, and the best methods of supporting that noble character.

If liberty be the characteristic of Englishmen; if so far as it be wanting a country be disordered; if all are concerned in paying their due
rites

rites at the shrine of Patriotism, and yet the most spotted symptoms of *mortifying* decay appear on the complexion of the state, many duties arise to our attention. I would be plain, and I must be concise. The whole of an *Englishman's* present duty, I apprehend, may, with strict propriety, be comprized under two glorious words :

OPPOSE and PERSEVERE.

It is a maxim of Grecian wisdom, often quoted, that any man was a traitor, who stood disengaged in a state of contending parties. And this held good even when the contest was only *family* or *personal*, and the result of it no more than whether this man or the other, by the importance of his connexions, or the brightness of his abilities, should be the object of support and preferment. But, when all the noble purposes of liberty are denied, and all its advantages at stake, to be indolent and asleep, is treason to a country, and cruelty to every rising age.

What a difference there is between a legal limited government, where property is secured, and justice fully administered, and that tyranny, where

where the lusts of one man, or a few, are the measures of obedience, is immediately evident; and *where* truth has ever been beloved, and gratitude warmed the soul, that difference will have an immediate constant, and irradicable influence.

There the native rights and liberties of Englishmen are known to be worth maintaining: the blood and treasure so greatly expended by our ancestors, to transmit them to their descendants, is deeply recorded; a perpetual jealousy is kept tremblingly awake for their defence, and a firm resolution is established to part with life, rather than to suffer the least diminution of them, and consent to the fettering of posterity.

And think, ye sons of liberty, who have often exulted with the highest reason, in your privileges, and while you hailed the heroes on your history, felt high satisfaction from a consciousness of imitating their characters; think one moment, on the aggravated miseries which would be your portion, if you were to be reduced to the dominion of lawless power; if the present
prerogative

prerogative administration were finally to prevail.

Three parts of the globe are born slaves; and never heard the emancipating voice of liberty; they put on their chains with their beings, and are only happy that they have no notions of freedom. It is yours to know, as to have *enjoyed*; and in proportion to your happiness must be your infamy and distress.

That spirit of manly independence and sworn resistance to the yoke of despotism, which you now express, would be broken down to fawning flattery, or abject subjection and cowardice; or if it existed, would not dare to appear; or if, from strong insuppressible resentments, it ventured to appear, would only aggravate woe, by provoking the furies of more pointed vengeance.

Sovereigns there have been who burned their
their Capitals, and amused themselves with the
brilliant appearance : Sovereigns who wished the
people

people had but one neck, that at one blow they might level their pride.

In this country we are taught to say, we have a most amiable and excellent prince on the throne, whose disposition is as certainly as the principles of his settlement, at the utmost distance from arbitrary power. *FREE ELECTION* brought his family hither; and on no other principle has he an inclination or a right to be here.

But still the flatterers of pomp and prerogative, to which fools give the name of Majesty, the ambitious, covetous and prostituted, who unfortunately have surrounded and obscured the throne, have worked as much mischief to the country as if *possessed* by the diabolical Spirit before alluded to.

Is there one pearl which can shed a lustre on *the royal diadem*; one law which property can take protection under; one humane virtue whose practice and influence are a blessing; but these men have sullied and trampled on. The
black

black catalogue need not be repeated ; nor can it be painted in its fulness of contempt and horror.

Arbitrary seizures and imprisonments in direct violation of Magna Charta. The suspension of laws in favour of court dependents, and overstraining them against the Free and Honest —The controul and even annihilation of Juries, where the tools of despotic and murdering agency sought for escape ; and above all, the great Barrier of Liberty, the right of Election in the *Freeholder*, trod under foot as of no estimation or force—Are facts as recent as they are alarming : And may we not adopt the words of *Addison* in his description of the Isle of Caprea, the favourite residence of *Tiberius*——that “ the works
“ under-ground are however more extraordinary
“ than all above it ; for the *rocks* are all *under-*
“ *mined.*”

The man, therefore, whose honest bosom has felt the ardours of patriotism, has every thing to arouse his apprehensions, and invigorate his zeal. His eye is kept steadily on facts. And, scorning that cowardice which calls tameness prudence, that interested hypocrisy, which
would

would give music to the mandate of lawless power ; and above all, that strumpet ridicule, which laughs at complaint, and would turn the anguish of distress into a charge of sedition,—he will often be enquiring into the great calls of duty.

Shall I, he will say, be silent and indifferent, when my country is wounded, and thus become confederate with her destroyers ? Shall I, who received so fair an inheritance of freedom from my fathers, be induced by corruption to sell, or cowardice to surrender it ? Let others vote and act as they may, in defiance of conscience, dear old friendships, and avowed professions of sentiment : They cannot alter the eternal laws of reason and justice, nor shall they ever have my voice or submission to their misdoings. Such is the vow of the freeman : nor does he want any encouragement to support him in this testimony of virtue, from the *nature and reason of things*, from former instances of success, or the generous spirit of the English people.

D

Religion,

Religion, truth, honour, and humanity, as in themselves they have an intrinsic beauty and excellence, inspire their votaries with principles infinitely superior to the fluctuating views of interest and ambition. Where the love of them has taken possession of the heart, their disciple has good ground to stand upon. Every reflection on his conduct gives him new satisfaction, and he only laments when he passes by an opportunity of marking his fidelity.

Old, but eternally valuable is the maxim that "truth is great, and will in the end prevail." In *sentiment* it always invites enquiry, as sure of coming off victorious on the most accurate investigation. And in *practice*, what is the man of pay to the man of principle? What the puffed-up pageant of accidental grandeur, to the liberal, brave, well-disciplined champion of the public rights. What, the servile, cringing, creeping creature of a court to the brave yeoman; the industrious merchant, and the determined Freeholder?

Opposition

Opposition also derives additional strength in the exalted cause of liberty, from former examples, and providential successes.

Truth and Liberty had always enemies. Reformation in every country and in every case has prejudices and passions to combat. And in this kingdom, the separating so large a part of its imperium from the Romish yoke, could not be submitted to with a gentle acquiescence. Many have been the secret machinations, and the open attempts to reconquer and reduce us. But, the destruction of the *invincible Armada* * of our now insulting enemy, Spain; the glorious battle of the BOYNE, the extirpation of the bigot house of Stuart, and the long glories of

* These topics of encouragement may be rather thought to apply to an opposition to national invasions, than to so inferior a circumstance as a bad ministry: and a mention of the fate of *Alfred's* corrupt judges, and the modern *Villiers*, *Straffords*, and *Mortimers*, rather more apposite to the subject. But the designs of corrupt and arbitrary ministers, and foreign enemies, are all the same, the ruin and slavery of the state. And if the people reflect on the defeats of their foes at large, as surely as the whole contains all its parts, they may take courage, and vow, from former capital deliverances, the destruction of bad managers and ministers.

the

the two Georges, particularly their triumph over two Scottish rebellions, and the matchless victories of the last war, are demonstrations how ineffectual the contrivances of wickedness, when opposed by virtue, under the protection of heaven.

To conclude this too long address, should I not be guilty of injustice, if I did not draw some pleasing inference from the present meeting of a certain *SOCIETY*. Candour may suggest that errors will be now rectified, and healing measures adopted. There has, to be sure, been time enough (if any time were necessary) to perceive the gross errors of the last convention, and to form resolutions of amending them. But, there has been time also to add more to the weight of ministerial persuasion, where it was needful, and to confirm the hardy and the hardened in their service. I doubt not, many are proportionally confirmed in the cause of truth; and go to the seat of business with reduplicated ardour in her cause. But a *minority* of voices, when backed only by *her*, prevail not. Little hopes therefore, may arise from this circumstance.

stance. But there is one meeting, I acknowledge it with pleasure, whence comfort is really to be derived.

Though our number, Gentlemen, be small, it is not so in relation to the place we live in, and our cause is the noblest in the world. Thanks also to the prevailing influence of the same principles; our expressions of zeal are but a small part of that glorious spirit, which pervades the bosoms, and animates the conduct of Freeholders, in every part of the kingdom. Witness their warm and reiterated remonstrances to the throne; witness the institution of that much abused, but most respectable society, who associate under the noblest name of **SUPPORTERS OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS**—witness the generous protection which the brave champion in the cause of liberty has experienced. Witness also the numerous and enormous pensions, places, titles and rewards, so lavishly bestowed by administration to bribe men of any abilities, to join in the measures of power.

Yet,

Yet, relief lingers : and the anxious lover of liberty and his country, is sometimes ready to sink under the prospect, and “ trembles at “ hereafter :”

Now lifted by the tide, and now reforb'd ;
And farther from his wishes than before.

Eternal blessings light on that *authentic messenger* who could bring us news of immediate redress !

But, let not *obstinacy* and perverseness of temper interpose to withhold the healing hand when supplicated, and about to be extended ; let the wallowers in public plunder plume themselves in their imagined security, and add *insult* to robbery ; let the plainest truths of law and reason be borne down by prerogative clamour, and hireling sophistry ; the chains which may be forged, or forging, are composed of dissoluble materials, and will soon fall to pieces by their own rottenness, or yield to the united weight and vigour of English laws, and English fortitude.

Then

Then will England revive with double splendour from her wrongs, and see a second Revolution, glorious as that we celebrate. A kingdom saved, and no *king* extirpated.

Then will those who in the present times fall not in its scandalous defection, but assert the injured rights of their country, and either *instruct* or remonstrate for their recovery and preservation, be mentioned with grateful remembrance; and *their* children, rising to the enjoyments of liberty, make *their* festivals happy, by dating their relation to those who knew what they ought to be, and *lived and died Freeman*.

Newport, Isle of Wight,
Nov. 15, 1770.

F I N I S.



